

W A S H I N G T O N
H I G H E R
EDUCATION
C O O R D I N A T I N G B O A R D

October 2005

2006 HECB Legislative Session Overview

BACKGROUND

The Washington Legislature will convene the 2006 session on Monday, January 9. The 60-day regular session will adjourn no later than March 9.

This report summarizes several of the higher education issues that are expected to receive legislative consideration in 2006. It is a preliminary document for the Higher Education Coordinating Board to use in considering its legislative priorities for the upcoming session. The HECB is scheduled to adopt its formal legislative agenda for 2006, when it meets on December 15 at the University of Washington Tacoma.

Information about additional issues and legislative proposals will be shared with the board as it becomes available.

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY ISSUES

Since the Legislature adjourned the 2005 session in April, a number of interim activities have taken place that could result in legislative proposals during the upcoming 60-day session. These include commencement of Governor Gregoire's Washington Learns project, which will comprehensively examine the state's P-16 public education finances and policies; the initiation of two higher education projects in Snohomish, Island and Skagit counties; and continuing development of a higher education plan for the Tri-Cities region in response to the Legislature's actions regarding future development of the state's research university branch campuses. In September, three House of Representatives committees held meetings in the Tri-Cities and Walla Walla areas to gain additional insight into the educational needs and economic development activities in the region.

Washington Learns

The Washington Learns steering committee – assisted by advisory committees for early learning, K-12 education, and higher education – was created during the summer under the provisions of SB 5441 to oversee the comprehensive study envisioned in the legislation. Roberta Greene, vice chair of the HECB, was appointed by the governor to chair the higher

education advisory committee and to serve as a member of the steering committee, which includes legislators, educators, and private citizens. The K-12 and higher education committees have focused considerable attention on the transitions between educational sectors and may develop specific proposals for improvement over the coming months.

The governor has indicated she will present a Washington Learns legislative package to the 2006 session, but it is expected to focus primarily on early learning issues. A progress report on the Washington Learns project is due to the Legislature by November 15, 2005, so additional information will be available before the HECB adopts its legislative agenda in December. The final Washington Learns report will be submitted in November 2006.

Snohomish-Island-Skagit issues

Work has begun on two initiatives approved by the Legislature and governor to refocus the management of the North Snohomish Island Skagit (NSIS) Higher Education Consortium, and to assess the postsecondary education needs of the three-county region. In HB 1794 (the 2005 branch campus legislation), the Legislature directed Everett Community College to develop a new management plan for NSIS and make recommendations by December 2005. In the 2005-07 state capital budget, the HECB was appropriated \$500,000 and directed to conduct a needs assessment and recommend strategies to address those needs in the three-county region. The HECB will submit an interim report to the Legislature by January 15, 2006, and a final report and recommendations by December 1, 2006.

While this work progresses, it is possible the Senate or House will reconsider an unsuccessful proposal from the 2005 session that would have established North Snohomish State College as a regional comprehensive institution.

Tri-Cities higher education issues

Earlier this year, the Legislature and governor enacted HB 1794 to direct the future development of Washington's four research university branch campuses. That legislation was based, in part, on recommendations from the HECB. Among other items, HB 1794 authorized the gradual admission of freshmen and sophomores at three of the branch campuses – the University of Washington branches at Bothell and Tacoma, and Washington State University Vancouver. The fourth campus, WSU Tri-Cities, received limited authorization to enroll lower division students for a biotechnology program based at the campus in Richland.

Since the session ended, the business and higher education community in the Tri-Cities has worked to develop a consensus proposal for a larger-scale expansion of baccalaureate and graduate programs at the Tri-Cities branch. A community group that includes representatives of the Tri-Cities economic development council (TRIDEC), the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, WSU, and Columbia Basin College, is expected to approve a formal proposal to the state in mid-November. The proposal likely will be available before the HECB adopts its formal legislative agenda in December.

House of Representatives interim committee meetings

The House Higher Education Committee and two other committees conducted several meetings and hearings in Southeast Washington in September. Several higher education issues were discussed that may lead to legislative proposals in 2006, including the fact that large percentages of recent high school graduates in the region need remedial instruction to gain the academic skills and knowledge they need to succeed at college. The legislators also discussed possible strategies to increase the number of K-12 teachers who specialize in math and science.

SUPPLEMENTAL OPERATING AND CAPITAL BUDGETS

As in each even-numbered year, the Legislature will consider supplemental budget proposals from state agencies to amend the biennial operating and capital budgets that were approved last spring. As this document was written in mid-October, the HECB had not received all of the supplemental proposals from the public colleges and universities. Meanwhile, the HECB has submitted several specific agency funding requests to the governor and Legislature. These proposals include supplemental funding for GEAR UP scholarships, an online student advising system, a statewide higher education data system, and a request for authority to expand the retirement benefit options for HECB employees. Details of these budget requests were reviewed at the HECB's meeting on September 22.